

*In Memory of*

**COOPER**

**Cy-Fair Family Mourns the Loss of Their Son while Supporting Others**

*Written by Belinda Denman*

*Select Photos by Marisa Hugonnett*

As high school graduations approach, I am preparing myself for bittersweet moments and that all too familiar stab of pain in my heart called grief. With our son, Parker, graduating from high school, this will be a happy time for us, but it will also be mixed with sad reminders of our youngest son, Cooper, who will never graduate.

In 2005, life was going very well for my family. We had a wonderful summer spending time at the beach, weekends at the lake, and participating in summer league swim teams. School finally started with all the normal excitement and nervousness. Cooper was 11 years old and had just started the fifth grade. He was very excited about his move up to middle school, where he would change classes and actually have his own locker. Parker, then 13, wasn't as excited about school as his younger brother. As an eighth grader, junior high was old hat for him.

### A Life-Changing Morning

Not long after school started, Hurricane Rita threatened to hit Houston in September. As a precaution, schools in our area closed for a few days. My husband and I weren't so lucky, though, and we had to go to work. Our boys were happy to get a chance to sleep and hang out a few extra days.

When Parker woke up on his day off, he expected to hear SpongeBob on TV. Cooper was usually up first and already in to the second episode of his favorite show by the time Parker woke up. The TV wasn't on that day, though, and Parker didn't hear any sounds coming from his brother's room. He assumed Cooper was still sleeping and decided to go in and check on Cooper.

My husband will never forget the hysterical call from Parker saying that something was wrong with his little brother and the paramedics were on the way. When they arrived, nothing could be done; he had been gone for hours. All they could tell us was it appeared that he had a seizure in his sleep. It took months to get his death certificate and it simply read, "Cause of death unknown."

### Coping with Loss

Our beautiful, perfectly healthy, 11-year-old son had died in his sleep. That day, our lives changed forever. As parents, we were tortured with the thought that we should have seen something the day before or checked on him in the middle of the night – or done something, anything, to save our youngest son.

Shocked and confused, isolated and heartbroken, my family was grieving. Life as we knew it had simply disappeared. The sounds of our boys laughing and wrestling were gone. We were left with the emptiness of our house. Most of the month following his death remains foggy. I think that must be God's way of helping the heartbroken to cope with a loss. Nothing would ever be the same – a table for four became painful to sit at, and driving by his school, which caused so much excitement before, is now a sad reminder of where Cooper should be.

The weight of our grief was overbearing. I worried about my family. How were we going to survive this? How would this experience affect Parker? We knew that a lot of marriages break up after the death of a child – we were determined not to become one of those statistics.



Parker Denman will graduate from high school this year

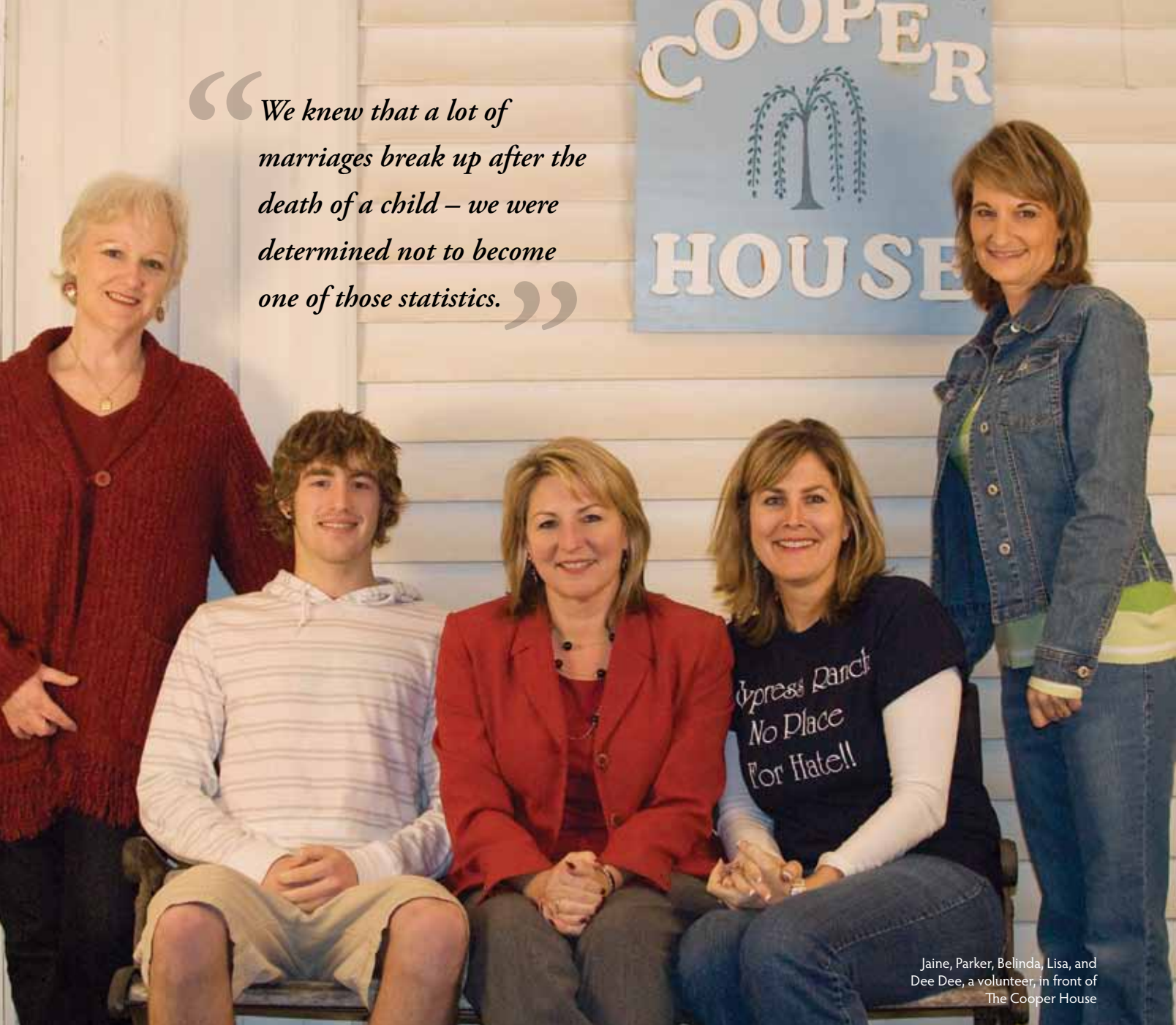


The Cooper Foundation helps children coping with the loss of a family member



Belinda and Jaine, who is a volunteer for the foundation

“We knew that a lot of marriages break up after the death of a child – we were determined not to become one of those statistics.”



Jaine, Parker, Belinda, Lisa, and Dee Dee, a volunteer, in front of The Cooper House

### Reaching Out for Support

My husband and I started participating in a grief support group at a local church. I remember sobbing through the first few meetings, but soon I started to feel the comfort of being with other people who understood and were trying to start their healing process, as well. I read every book I could find written by parents who had lost a child. Their stories validated my feelings and let me know that families can find a way to live through their grief.

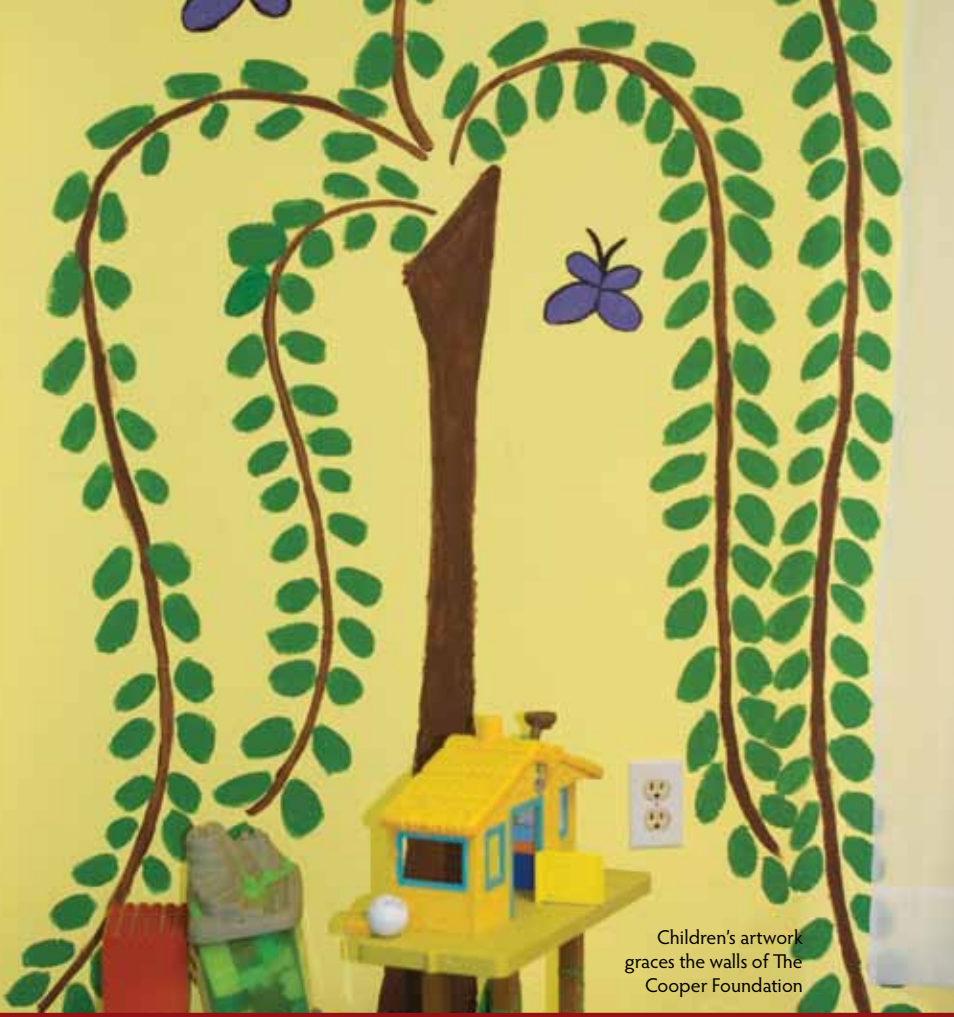
We started a support group for other grieving families called The Cooper Foundation. We created family rituals to help keep Cooper's memory alive. I listen to the SpongeBob theme song on my iPod, we have Cooper's favorite Gold Fish snacks at every family event, we eat all his favorite foods on his birthday, and we light candles to remind us he will always be with us.

### Cherishing Family

It's been four years since Cooper's death. In June, my husband and I will attend Parker's high school graduation. We will be happily cheering for him as he accepts his diploma and we will be thinking of Cooper and wishing he was there. We have learned as a family to cherish every moment and appreciate the time we have together.

We don't know why Cooper died. We do know our grieving will never end. Every dark-haired little boy we see reminds us of Cooper and will forever bring both a smile and a tear. **CFM**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Cy-Fair Magazine would like to thank Belinda Denman and her family for sharing their memories of Cooper and their story of hope.*



Children's artwork graces the walls of The Cooper Foundation



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## Continuing COOPER'S Legacy

The Cooper Foundation was founded by Belinda Denman who discovered that after her son, Cooper's, death, there were no children or teen grief support groups in the Cy-Fair area. "The Cooper Foundation exists to provide the support that is desperately needed for grieving kids at the worst time in their lives," Denman says. "This is Cooper's legacy."

On-going support groups for children ages 7-18 are available, as well as a young adult group for those 19-28 years old. Groups are led by trained grief facilitators who encourage children to share their memories and support one another. Camp Met is also offered to teens every year and includes camping activities and grief activities that help them to share their feelings. The foundation's goal is to provide a safe environment where grieving families can begin the healing process.

"In the future, we hope to be able to add additional peer support groups, but that will take time as we search for donations and more volunteers," Denman says. "You don't have to be a therapist or counselor to volunteer, just a caring person who wants to help. We provide all the training you will need."

The Cooper Foundation is located in Tomball on Hwy. 2920. Visit [thecooperfoundation.org](http://thecooperfoundation.org).